



INSTRUCT-O-GRAM

THE HANDS-ON TRAINING GUIDE FOR THE FIRE INSTRUCTOR

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Ensuring Fire Department Quality

TASK

Successful contemporary fire departments have recognized the importance of ensuring the quality of the services that they deliver to the communities that they protect. Developing an understanding of the importance of quality management and the aspects of quality that must be addressed by the contemporary fire department will enable the fire department to ensure its readiness to fully deliver professional, effective, and efficient services, in a safe manner, while ensuring necessary community confidence and support.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this session, participants will:

1. Understand the role and importance of quality within the successful contemporary fire department.
2. Understand how customers define quality and the dimensions on which quality is judged.
3. Understand the characteristics of fire department services.
4. Understand the expectations that stakeholders have for their fire departments.
5. Understand the challenges involved in delivery of quality fire department services.
6. Understand the essential elements and requirements for a successful fire department quality management program.
7. Understand the benefits that can accrue from a fire department quality management program and the costs of not addressing service quality.

AUDIENCE

The nature of this subject matter makes it appropriate for all disciplines of emergency responders. It is designed for presentation to all fire department personnel, given the importance of total involvement of fire department personnel in successful fire department quality management programs.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS

Audiovisual materials and handouts may be prepared to illustrate the course content.

ESTIMATED TEACHING TIME

Two hours for classroom presentation and discussion. One additional hour can be utilized for an application activity specifically related to quality management within the fire department(s) represented.

MOTIVATING THE STUDENT

The future success of contemporary fire departments will in large measure be determined by their ability to ensure the quality of the services that they deliver to the stakeholders who live in, work in, and travel through their jurisdictions. In addition to contributing to the effectiveness, efficiency and safety of fire department operations, a quality management program can ensure that the fire department is in actuality and perception meeting the expectations of its stakeholders and thus receiving their continued confidence and support.

PRESENTATION PHASE

I. Role and Importance of Quality

- A. Contemporary Organizations – Contemporary organizations in all endeavors have recognized the importance of ensuring the quality of their products and/or services in the interest of ensuring

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customer loyalty and support thus contributing to organizational success.

- B. Customer Expectations – Members of contemporary society have developed expectations regarding the quality of products and/or services that they will receive from contemporary organizations.
- C. Fire Departments – As organizations, fire departments are held to the same high expectations of quality as are other contemporary organizations.
- D. The Quality Imperative – Quality has become a necessity to organizational success and survival.

II. Evolution of Quality

- A. Traditional Approach – In the past some organizations recognized the importance of quality products and/or services; others did not. Those organizations that did recognize the importance of quality and commit to ensuring quality typically delegated the responsibility for quality to one or more quality control inspectors.
- B. Contemporary Approach – Most contemporary organizations, especially those that are successful, commit to a comprehensive quality management program, wherein each and every member of the organization is expected to be involved in the organization's efforts to ensure the quality of its products and/or services.

III. Definitions of Quality

- A. Product Definition – Quality can be defined according to the specific features or attributes of a given product or service.
- B. Relative Quality Definition – Quality can be defined in terms of comparing a given product or service to other like products or services.
- C. Manufacturing Definition – Quality can be defined in terms of conformance to set specifications.
- D. Value Definition – Quality can be defined in terms of the benefits that a product or service provides in relationship to its cost.
- E. User Definition – Quality can be defined in terms of what the customer expects. Thus quality is defined based on the wants and needs of a given customer. In reality this is probably the most important definition of quality for an organization to consider.

IV. Dimensions of Quality

- A. Aesthetics – The appearance of the product/service.
- B. Conformance – Whether a product/service conforms to established specifications or requirements.
- C. Durability – Whether the product/service is long-lasting or enduring.
- D. Features – The features or attributes of the product/service.

- E. Performance – The ability of the product/service to function properly.
- F. Reliability – The stability of the product/service delivery over time.
- G. Serviceability – The ease of servicing a product/service.
- H. Perceived Quality – The overall perception of product/service quality held by customers. Once again, this is probably the most important aspect for an organization to focus its quality improvement efforts on.

V. Defining Your Customers

- A. Internal Customers – These are customers within the organization or system. This could include other emergency responder groups, such as law enforcement or emergency medical services who may call upon the services of the fire department.
- B. External Customers – Individuals who live in, work in, or travel through the fire department's jurisdiction would be considered external customers.

VI. Identifying Customer Expectations

- A. Customer Needs – Include products/services that customers require.
- B. Customer Wants – Include products/services that customers desire.
- C. Customer Expectations – Involve what customers expect of an organization and the products/services that it provides.
- D. Meeting and Exceeding Wants and Needs – The successful contemporary organization seeks to both "meet and exceed" the expectations of its existing and potential customers.

VII. Characteristics of Fire Department Services

- A. Customization of Services – The services delivered by the fire department usually involve customized strategies, tactics and actions based on sizing up the needs of a given incident.
- B. Labor Intensive – The services performed by the fire department, while utilizing expensive capital equipment, tend to be fairly labor intensive. Emergency responders deliver such services as firefighting and rescue activities.
- C. Immediate Service Consumption – The services provided by fire departments are such that they are delivered on demand in an emergency situation and immediately serve to benefit the stakeholders in need of assistance at an incident scene.
- D. Intangible Delivery – By their very nature, the deliverables of the fire department tend to consist of intangible services rather than traditional products.
- E. Transaction Volume Variations – There are significant variations in response transaction

volumes that must be addressed when ensuring fire department readiness.

- F. **Unscheduled Service Delivery** - Fire department responses to emergency incidents are unscheduled and relatively unpredictable

VIII. Stakeholder Expectations for Fire Departments

Stakeholders are individuals, groups and/or organizations that have a vested interest in the successful operation of the fire department. Stakeholders represent the fire department's customers.

- A. **Accessibility** – Stakeholders expect that they will have access to the services provided by the fire department at the time that they need them.
- B. **Completeness** – Stakeholders expect that they will receive complete and comprehensive services from their fire department.
- C. **Consistency** – Stakeholders expect the services rendered by their fire department to not significantly vary based on time of day, day of week, or responding personnel.
- D. **Convenience** – Fire department stakeholders expect that it will be easy to request and receive the services of the fire department when they are needed.
- E. **Courtesy** – Stakeholders expect that fire department personnel will engage in courteous behavior at all times.
- F. **Effectiveness** – Stakeholders expect their fire department to be effective in fulfilling its mission of service to the community.
- G. **Efficiency** – Stakeholders expect that their fire department will utilize resources in a manner that contributes to efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- H. **Image** – Stakeholders expect their fire department to instill confidence and trust through maintaining an appropriate image.
- I. **Professionalism** – Stakeholders expect that fire department personnel will act professionally under all circumstances and situations.
- J. **Responsiveness** – Stakeholders expect that their fire department will demonstrate readiness and responsiveness to address any emergency to which it responds.
- K. **Timeliness** – Stakeholders expect that their fire department will arrive in a timely manner when called to an emergency situation.

IX. Challenges in Delivering Quality Fire Department Services

- A. **Determining Service Levels** – Service level is a defined acceptable level of service. It recognizes the reality that to have sufficient fire department resources in readiness at all times to respond and arrive at every incident within a predefined timeframe would be both unrealistic and an

inappropriate and inefficient use of organizational resources.

- B. **Determining Quality Indicators** – Agreement must be reached on the quality indicators (benchmarks) that the fire department will use in measuring and evaluating quality.
- C. **Determining Quality Measures and Techniques** – Once the quality indicators have been established, the measures and techniques for measuring quality must be determined. In doing so, it is important to answer the following three questions:
 1. What should be controlled?
 2. Who should provide control?
 3. When should we control?
- D. **Role of Behavior in Quality** – It is important to understand the role of individual behavior of fire department personnel in ensuring quality given the service nature of our business.

X. Essential Elements of a Quality Management Program

- A. **Data Collection** – Data must be collected in accordance with the quality indicators, measures and techniques that have been established.
- B. **Data Analysis** – Appropriate statistical analysis must be performed on the data that has been collected.
- C. **Data Interpretation** – The results of data analysis must be reviewed and interpreted with respect to both those fire department operations that are producing high levels of quality as well as those areas in need of improvement.
- D. **Action Plan Development** – An action plan must be developed that addresses the need to enhance quality through the active involvement of fire department personnel in the development and implementation of the action plan.
- E. **Evaluation** – Continual evaluation of the fire department's progress in enhancing and ensuring the quality of its services must be an integral component of a successful quality management program.

XI. Requirements for Successful Quality Management

- A. **Communication** – Effective communications within the organization and with organizational stakeholders is a foundational aspect of ensuring a successful quality management program.
- B. **Information Access/Availability** – The necessary information for decision making related to enhancing and ensuring quality must be both available and accessible by organizational personnel.
- C. **Leadership** – Effective and visionary leadership throughout the organization enhances the success of a quality management program.
- D. **Measurement Systems** – The necessary measurement systems must be in place and be

utilized to acquire the necessary data on which to make quality improvement decisions and evaluate quality.

- E. Reporting Systems – Once data is collected it must be appropriately analyzed and reported to those addressing various aspects of organizational quality.
- F. Top Management Support – A crucial attribute of a successful quality management program is always credible and visible top management support.
- G. Total Involvement – The truly successful quality management program is based on full, total and enthusiastic involvement of all members of the organization.
- H. Training and Education – Thorough training and education, in technical, management and quality management topics, underpins the success of a quality management program.

XII. Benefits of Total Quality Management

- A. Accomplishment of Mission – A comprehensive quality management program contributes to fulfillment of organizational mission.
- B. Better Resource Utilization – Quality improvements contribute to a more efficient utilization of human resources as well as other organizational resources.
- C. Enhanced Customer Satisfaction – A customer-focused quality management program contributes to increased customer satisfaction.
- D. Improved Product/Service Delivery – A quality management program leads to improved delivery of products and/or services.
- E. Improved Product/Service Quality – Quality management programs can significantly improve the quality of an organization's products and/or services.
- F. Increased Effectiveness – Increased organizational effectiveness is a typical result of quality management initiatives.
- G. Increased Efficiency – Increased organizational efficiency is a common outgrowth of a quality management program.

- H. Increased Flexibility – Organizations with successful comprehensive quality management programs develop an enhanced ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances.
- I. Reduced Costs – Quality management initiatives are also known to contribute to reduced production and delivery costs.

XIII. Costs of Quality Deficiencies

- A. Loss of Community Support/Funding – Actual or perceived quality deficiencies with respect to the fire department typically result in a corresponding loss of community support, including funding, to the fire department.
- B. Loss of Organizational Reputation – Nothing can take a greater toll on any organization than a loss of its reputation. This is likely to be the case in situations where members of the community know actual or perceived quality deficiencies.
- C. Loss of Public Confidence/Trust – Those who live in, work in, and travel through communities will quickly lose confidence and trust in a fire department that delivers services of unacceptable quality and thus fails to “meet and exceed” stakeholder expectations.

APPLICATION

Engage students in a discussion of how their fire department(s) and the communities that they serve could benefit from the establishment of a fire department quality management program.

SUMMARY

The future success of your fire department will depend on its ability to “meet and exceed” the expectations of its stakeholders. As a fire department member, you have an integral role in enhancing and ensuring the quality of the services delivered by your fire department.

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